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AUTHOR	Hanninen, Gail E.
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ABSTRACT

The digest addresses issues related to preschool gifted and talented children. Such a child is defined as one who functions significantly above average age level in language development, thinking skills, creative thinking skills, physical adaptability, social skills, and/or leadership. Early identification is viewed as important, and the use of teacher and parent checklists is considered. Teachers are urged to note behaviors, such as the use of advanced vocabulary, spontaneous elaboration on new experiences and demonstration of abstract concept understanding. Parents should observe their child's behavior in terms of dramatic play, constructive play, and humor. Children's peers may also be sources of information for the identification of a gifted child. A brief list of resources concludes the digest. (CL)

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1985
DIGEST

THE PRESCHOOL GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILD

Who Is the Preschool Gifted and Talented Child?

A preschool child, age 2-5, who functions significantly above age level in language development, thinking skills, creative thinking skills, physical adaptability, social skills, and or leadership skills may be gifted and talented. Specific identification criteria for program placement may be determined by state or local agency guidelines.

Is Early Identification and Education of Value to the Preschool Gifted and Talented Child?

Research indicates that a critical portion of an individual's intellectual ability and creative ability is developed during early childhood. Thus, it is important for a young gifted and talented child to be provided with an enriched learning environment which is designed to meet the unique needs of each child in a variety of ways. Consequently, a child's readiness to learn and to create is the determining factor in the type of learning experiences presented. Such an opportunity should take into consideration the fact that demonstrated advanced ability in one area may not necessarily mean similar levels of performance in all areas.

How Can a Preschool Gifted and Talented Child Be Identified?

Regardless of how a preschool gifted and talented child is identified, more than one source of information should be used in determining a child's ability levels—intellectual, creative, physical, social and emotional. When administering standardized tests, the examiner should be a professional who has had experience working with preschool children. In addition to tests, observation techniques such as those developed by Piaget, anecdotal reports from parents and teachers, or peer checklists may provide valuable information.

What Is a Teacher Checklist?

If a child is enrolled in a preschool program, the teacher will have many opportunities to observe those characteristics and behaviors that may indicate exceptional ability. Some of the behaviors that a teacher could observe in a gifted and talented preschool child are:

- Appropriately uses vocabulary considered to be advanced for age
- Spontaneously elaborates on new experiences
- Constructs interesting shapes or patterns using blocks, play dough, drawing materials, and similar items in an innovative manner
- Demonstrates the ability to assemble new or difficult puzzles
- Employs a sense of humor in general conversation
- Expresses an understanding of abstract concepts such as time, death, and fairness
- Masters a new skill with little repetition
- Demonstrates advanced physical skills for age level
- Demonstrates an advanced reasoning ability through the explanation of occurrences
- Easily picks up musical themes or songs and repeats or embellishes on the theme

Such a checklist is helpful in giving insight to individual differences and abilities.

What Should Parents Be Looking for in Observing Their Children?

Parents' observations are invaluable in the identification of preschool gifted children. Parents are able to supply developmental information and other data not readily observable in more structured situations. A child's approach to dramatic play, constructive play, and humor can provide a great deal of information regarding the child's level of intellectual and creative development. Intensive interaction among young children takes place during less supervised and less structured play situations and, therefore, should be included as part of a comprehensive identification process. Observations should take place when children are free to choose activities either alone or with others and when they have access to a variety of materials. Free play behavior should be observed for periods of approximately 15 minutes. Include at least one indoor and one outdoor observation. Make such observations for several days and record them for future reference.

Some questions which may guide a parent's observation are:

- *Dramatic Play.* Does your child ever engage in make-believe play? Which best describes the variety in your child's dramatic play? (a) has one favorite theme which is used almost all of the time, (b) uses two or three favorite themes which he likes to vary but generally sticks with, or (c) has a wide range of themes and enjoys a variety.
- *Constructive Play.* Does your child ever engage in play in which she makes things, build things, or draws? During "free play," what does she tend to make? Which statement best applies to the products of your child's constructive play? (a) attempts to make products as representative of reality as possible, (b) products have some unique aspects as well, or (c) draws or makes things as she remembers them or would like for them to be with little attention to perspective, proportion, or relationships.
- *Humor.* Which statement best describes your child's ability to perceive humor? (a) makes little or no attempt to do or say funny things, (b) attempts to do or say some

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funny things primarily to imitate what he has seen others do, or (c) can take information and use it to produce creative humor which is new.

Why Should Information From a Child's Peers Be Considered?

Children's perceptions of their peers can be a revealing source of information. Therefore, having young children tell about what they see their friends doing may be helpful information to support decisions for further evaluation. To find out how children perceive their peers, have them respond to such questions as:

- Who in class can make a broken toy work?
- Who in class can make up the best new game?
- Who is the best at getting others to do things?
- Who asks the most questions?

How Can Parents Help Meet the Needs of The Preschool Gifted and Talented Child?

Parents can help meet the needs of their preschool gifted and talented child by providing a wide variety of experiences. Take your child to museums, airports, and the library. Play new games, do experiments, engage in sports, and listen to music together. If your child is enrolled in a structured educational or enrichment program, parent participation, input, and support are vital to ensure that the program is meeting the needs of your child. Parents are their child's first teachers and, therefore, have a responsibility to provide secure and quality learning environments.

Where Can I Get More Information About Preschool Gifted and Talented Children?

If you are interested in more information, contact your state's consultant for gifted, refer to the resources listed below, or write to:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and
Gifted Children
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091

RESOURCES

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Prepared by Gail E. Hanninen, Gifted Coordinator, Kalispell School District, Kalispell, Montana.

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